

AND THE LORD GOD MADE  
FOR ADAM AND HIS WIFE,  
**GARMENTS OF  
SKINS**  
AND CLOTHED THEM.

GEN 3:21

## Reflection:

August 2024

The original sin had been committed, and their immediate reaction was to run for cover, to hide from God. As is often the case, with sin came a sense of shame at what they had done. While they hid themselves in shame, God came looking for them. He always does!

When we realise the depth of our sins, a sense of guilt and shame wells up within us. All of us have experienced it at some point in our lives. Sin evokes in us a feeling of embarrassment that makes us feel socially or relationally unacceptable. We feel little in the eyes of the other. Our failures, a family member going astray, loss in a material or spiritual venture, or inability to fulfil our responsibilities, can all trigger a feeling of guilt and shame within us. Sexual sins, and the brokenness that comes with it, can be the worst of all. While the guilt of sin is often washed away through sincere repentance and confession, shame tends to linger on as a deep-seated pattern of thinking and feeling. If guilt is about something we have done, shame is about who we are.

Being in a state of shame can have a hugely negative influence on our psyche and can lead to behaviours that draw us further away from ourselves, from others and even from God. We quickly find ourselves in a vicious cycle of shame from which we see no way out. Shame can often lead to blame, where we blame ourselves, those who caused us shame, or even God who we feel allowed it. Our relationship with self, others, and God takes a severe beating. Sometimes we refrain from approaching God due to the shame of our sinful past, and often, we force ourselves to wear masks to cover our shame and be presentable to others. Oh, the misery of shame!

Thankfully, we have a God who would not allow us to continue in this state of shame but rather emptied himself, took on the form of a servant, and died an ignominious death on the cross (cf Phil 2:6-8). How it pained His heart to see his children's futile attempt at covering up their shame using fig leaves! Seeing them covered in confusion and fear and shame, and their realisation that they were naked, God steps in to meet them where they are. With his loving hands, he makes them garments of skin and clothes them. Was that skin taken from an animal? If so, it was to cover the shame of man that blood was first shed upon the earth! It would be an event that foreshadowed the ultimate shedding of the blood of God's eternal Son on Calvary.

In the incarnation, Jesus deeply identified with the shame of man! His genealogy was not one to be proud of. Right from his nativity, marked by Joseph's inability to find a better birthing place, through his public life primarily spent in the company of discriminated people like prostitutes and tax collectors, to his ugly, naked death on the cross, he bore it all willingly. We have in Jesus a high priest who can sympathise with our weakness, who was tempted in every way like we are. (cf. Heb 4:15). He became sin so that in him, we would become the righteousness of God. (2 Cor 5:21).

All of us do fall and the evil one is quick to accuse and shame us. How then do we tackle shame in our day-to-day life? Far from being helpful, telling someone not to be ashamed about something sadly reinforces it. Any shame needs to be spiritually acknowledged. The blood shed as a sacrifice for our sins cleanses our guilt. Through the Sacrament of Reconciliation, we appropriate it. He carried our shame in his body on the Cross and we enter into the merits of His Cross through baptism. Anyone who is immersed in Christ in baptism is a new creation. The old self of shame is gone and the new has come! Opening ourselves to a spiritual director and people we truly trust is therapeutic and a great catalyst in the healing process.

Like Adam and Eve who allowed God to cover their shame, let us allow God to clothe us with the garment of righteousness won for us by the sacrifice of Jesus. Then shame can no longer define us. As St Pope John Paul II said, "We are not the sum of our weaknesses and failures, we are the sum of the Father's love for us and our real capacity to become the image of His Son Jesus."

Dr Abish Antony

Dr Abish, a psychiatrist by profession, lives in Perth with his wife Anu and five children. He currently serves as the National Formation Coordinator of Australia